

WÆT PE EARD

na in gearum. þeod cynnig  
þrym se þrymon huda æþelungas elles  
fre medon. of seylð scepung sceapen  
þreatum monegū mæghum meodo secl  
of teal esode eorl syddan aqest pæp  
fæ scæp funden he þæs þroffe seba  
peox under polenum peopð myndam þali  
od þ him æthnole hana samfæten dria

ofen  
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# Tolkien Among Scholars

a publication of  
Tolkien Society Unquendor

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## Lembas Extra 2016

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### Printed and bound at

Uitgeverij IJmond, Beverwijk, Netherlands  
www.ahvobraiths.nl

Tolkien Genootschap Unquendor  
www.unquendor.nl

Tolkienwinkel (Tolkienshop)  
Utrechtse Jaagpad 2  
2313 KW Leiden  
the Netherlands  
www.tolkienwinkel.nl

*Lembas Extra* is published by Tolkien Genootschap Unquendor and is available from Unquendor and at the Tolkienshop.

Back issues of *Lembas Extra* are available from Unquendor and at the Tolkienshop.

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ISBN 978-90-826504-0-2

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## New Roads and Secret Gates, Waiting Around the Corner: Investigating Tolkien's other Anglo-Saxon Sources

THIJS PORCK



There is much of the medieval in Middle-earth. A clear example is the map of Thror, found at the beginning of virtually every edition of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. The 'moon runes' on this map were based on the Anglo-Saxon *futhorc*: the runic alphabet used in early medieval England on such items as combs, stones and magical rings. In addition, the little hand in the left-hand margin of Thror's map resembles a typical medieval *manicula*: a drawing of a pointing hand found in manuscripts to call attention to important pieces of text. Less notable, perhaps, but not less medieval is the map's orientation: North can be found on the left and East is on top, as was the case for many medieval European maps prior to the introduction of the compass in the thirteenth century. Next, there are the drawings with accompanying texts, such as a spider along with the remark 'there are spiders'. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Porck 2012; Porck 2015a), Thror's map has an Anglo-Saxon analogue in the so-called Cotton World Map in London, British Library Cotton Tiberius B.v, which features a drawing of a lion and the remark 'hic abundant leones' [here are many lions]. All these medieval characteristics of Thror's map demonstrate that, once we open our copies of *The Hobbit*, we immediately find ourselves in a medieval or medievalist world.

Given the presence of such medieval elements in Tolkien's fiction as well as his academic interest and career in Anglo-Saxon language and literature, one of the dominant modes of Tolkien scholarship has been source criticism with a primary focus on Tolkien's interaction with sources from the Middle Ages (e.g., Shippey 2003; Honegger 2005; Lee & Solopova, 2015). Several contributions to this volume also take this route and the present article is meant, in part, as an introduction to this mode of interpretation. In addition, it aims to outline



a method, and provide examples, of exploring early medieval English material that has not yet been widely discussed in Tolkien scholarship: Tolkien's 'other' Anglo-Saxon sources.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. APPRECIATING BOTH THE SOUP AND THE BONES: TOLKIEN AND THE STUDY OF HIS SOURCES

An essential introduction to the application of source criticism to Tolkien's fictional work is provided by Jason Fisher (2011b). The basic methodology is summed up in three questions: Could Tolkien have known the source? What did he do with it? And how does this help us appreciate whatever work we are investigating? (36) With regard to the first question, Fisher distinguishes between three types of sources. First and foremost are the 'best sources, those which Tolkien acknowledged himself' (36). The Old English poem *Beowulf* naturally falls into this category, since Tolkien described it as being 'among my most valued sources' in one of his letters (*Letters* 31). A second category consists of probable sources, 'those Tolkien is known to have read, owned, enjoyed, or commented on' (Fisher 2011b, 36). As I will illustrate in the last part of this article, mining Tolkien's academic work for references to other material does indeed provide some clue to what may have inspired his fiction. Lastly, Fisher identifies 'possible sources': items Tolkien may have been familiar with, even though he never commented on them himself.<sup>2</sup>

Fisher's second question – what did Tolkien do with his source? – can prompt a range of answers. One of those answers is 'direct borrowing', such as the scene of Bilbo stealing the cup from Smaug in *The Hobbit*, which has an almost exact parallel in *Beowulf* (Fisher, 2011b, 39). Similarly, the reforging of Aragorn's sword Andúril from the shards of Narsil corresponds to the making of Sigurd's sword Gram in chapter 15 of the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga*.<sup>3</sup> Tolkien's

1) Naturally, Tolkien was inspired by more than just early medieval English material, as other contributions to this volume illustrate (see also the various contributions to Fisher, 2011a). The focus on Anglo-Saxon material in this article is due to my own expertise as an Anglo-Saxonist.

2) The risks of source identification have been pointed out by various scholars and include, for instance, the notion that 'similarity does not imply descent' (Drout & Wynne 2000, 107). Moreover, the lengthy coming into being of Tolkien's *Legendarium* must always be taken into account: parts of Tolkien's *Silmarillion* predate the published version by up to sixty years and some sources, therefore, may not have been available at the time of composition (Fisher 2011b, 37).

3) The smith Regin fashions the sword from two pieces of a sword that formerly belonged to Sigurd's father Sigmund.

knowledge of the *Völsunga saga* is well attested, since the Old Icelandic text lies at the basis of his *The Legend of Sigurd & Gudrún*.

Parody is another of Tolkien's possible responses to his sources. Fisher (2011b), like Tom Shippey (2003) before him, points out that the story of the founding hobbits Marcho and Blanco serves as a parody of the origin myth of the Anglo-Saxons: the brothers Hengest and Horsa who led the Angles, Saxons and Jutes to Britain. Like Hengest ('stallion') and Horsa ('horse'), Marcho and Blanco both bear names that mean 'horse'. Another example of parody is Sauron's handing out rings in order to bind their recipients to him. Here, we can see an echo of the early medieval notion of the king as a ring-giver. That notion is reflected in several descriptive phrases used for a king in *Beowulf*: 'sinc-gyfan' [giver of treasure] (l. 1012a), 'sinces bryttan' [distributor of treasure] (l. 1922b), 'gold-gyfan' [giver of gold] (l. 2652) and, more specifically, 'beaga bryttan' [distributor of rings] (ll. 35a, 352a) and 'hringa fengel' [lord of the rings] (l. 2345b). Whereas the rings distributed by the early medieval kings merely inspire warriors to repay their lords with loyalty, Sauron's gifts bind and constrain. As such, Sauron is a parodic perversion of the early medieval ideal of the generous lord (see also Porck 2015b).

Fisher further notes how Tolkien often responds to themes dealt with in his sources. With various medieval authors, Tolkien shared an interest in such issues as heroism, exile, transience, oaths and gift-giving. However, he rarely sought to merely copy these medieval ideas: he 'reshaped' them to suit his own time and world view (see, e.g., Bowman; Honegger in this volume).

When it came to studying an author's sources, and especially his own, Tolkien voiced some serious misgivings (Shippey 2011). In his 'On Fairy Stories', he outright denounced 'source-hunting' by quoting the words of Sir George Dasent: 'We must be satisfied with the soup that is set before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled' (Tolkien 1983, 120). For Tolkien, this statement meant that we must simply enjoy the story and not be bothered with where the author got his ideas from, lest we him of merely copy-pasting his story from different sources. Given this discomfort, various scholars have tried to defend the use of sources to approach Tolkien. In what follows, some of the purposes that they have proposed for source criticism are illustrated with reference to Tolkien's most-studied Anglo-Saxon sources: Old English language and poetry.

Most Tolkien scholars will point out that revealing how Tolkien imaginatively adapted his sources in his fiction enhances a reader's appreciation of his works. In the words of Tom Shippey, it 'brings out Tolkien's extremely keen eye for the vital detail' (Shippey 2003,220). Tolkien's apt choice of Old English words for personal names is a case in point. Thomas Honegger(2005), for instance, has pointed out that it is easy for a medievalist to recognise the unsavoury character of Gríma Wormtongue, son of Gálmód, given the meaning of the Old English words *gríma* 'face, mask' and *gālmód* 'wanton, licentious'. Similarly, a medievalist will catch on to Éowyn's hidden identity much sooner than any other character in *The Lord of the Rings*, since her false name Dernhelm means 'secret helmet' in Old English: *derne* 'secret, hidden' and *helm* 'helmet'. Dernhelm is possibly the worst name for someone who wants her identity to remain a secret; luckily for Éowyn, Merry does not speak Old English!

A further advantage of recognising Tolkien's use of sources is that it may explain why his fictional world comes across as authentic. The identification of medieval elements in Middle-earth reveals how Tolkien infused his secondary world with 'realism'. In his 'On Fairy Stories', Tolkien (1983) himself noted how successful sub-creators need to draw on reality to create a credible world:

Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality that can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: 'inner consistency of reality', it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. (155)

The incorporation of medieval material appears to have been Tolkien's way of achieving the 'inner consistency of reality' that many readers appreciate so much about Middle-earth. The fact that Tolkien based his Rohirrim on the Anglo-Saxons, for instance, is a fair illustration of this point. Not only do their names make sense, their rituals, societal structure and even the language they speak in *The Lord of the Rings* have parallels with the Anglo-Saxons, as many scholars have already noted (e.g., Shippey, 2003; Honegger, 2011). The community of the horse-lords of Middle-earth feels authentic, because, in part, it has

real, historical roots.

Source criticism may also reveal how Tolkien developed his narrative strategies and techniques. Bolintineanu, for instance, has pointed out how Tolkien's use of allusions and inset-narratives in *The Lord of the Rings* was likely inspired and based on the techniques used by the early medieval *Beowulf* poet. Similarly, the lack of physical description of the monster Grendel in the same Old English poem may have triggered Tolkien's equally vague introduction of Gollum in the first edition of *The Hobbit* (see Porck 2012). Furthermore, as is well known, Tolkien based some of his poetic techniques on the medieval poetry he studied. The battle-cry of Théoden, for instance, can be divided into half lines that show the structural alliteration of stressed syllables that is so typical of poetry in the older Germanic languages, such as Old English:

Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden!  
Fell deeds awake, fire and slaughter!  
spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered,  
a sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises!  
Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor!

(*LotR*, p. 870)

Théoden's cry, like his name (from Old English *þēoden* 'king'), is steeped in the early medieval tradition of the Anglo-Saxons, adding once more to the realistic feel of this nation of horse-people.

Some critics do not report on Tolkien's use of sources to advance the understanding of Tolkien's fiction, but aim to elevate the status of the source material itself. A good example of this approach is an article on Old English influences on *The Lord of the Rings* by Clive Tolley, part of a series of introductory essays on Old English and Old Norse literature. Tolley's essay has as its running title 'Is it relevant?' and aims to demonstrate that the study of early medieval language and literature is indeed relevant, since it allows for a more thorough understanding of Tolkien. As such, Tolley's piece is an attempt to 'market' the scholarly study of Old English to a wider audience that is drawn to the study of medieval language and literature through an appreciation of Tolkien.

In all, the study of Tolkien's sources, despite the author's own fears, may be beneficial to the appreciation of the soup as well as the bones.



## 2. LOW- AND HIGH-HANGING FRUIT: TOLKIEN'S ANGLO-SAXON SOURCES

As is clear from my examples so far, much of Tolkien scholarship has focused on the medieval language and literature that Tolkien specialised in: Old English language and Anglo-Saxon poetry. This particular approach has a long history, going as far back at least as the 1969 Ph.D. thesis by Bonniejean McGuire Christensen. Rather surprisingly from the standpoint of a present-day Tolkien scholar, Christensen complained that, whereas 300 articles had been published about Tolkien's work, so far '[n]one has investigated the relationship between scholarly pursuits and literary products, or indeed acknowledged the existence of a relationship to be investigated' (4). Some fifty years later, Tolkien scholars can complain of quite the opposite: the well seems all but dried up. Indeed, Fisher (2011b) remarks 'by this stage in Tolkien studies, most of the low-hanging fruit has long gone' (37–38) and Michael D. C. Drout (2015), in his review of the recently published *Beowulf* translation and commentary by Tolkien, noted soberly that 'the volume does not provide us with many previously unnoted links between *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*' (170). In order to find new connections between Anglo-Saxon sources and Tolkien, it appears as though it is necessary to climb a little higher up the early medieval English tree and reach for fruit on higher branches: Tolkien's 'other' Anglo-Saxon sources.

Since most of the more obvious Anglo-Saxon sources (*The Battle of Maldon*, *Beowulf* and the use of Old English words) have been vigorously analysed already in connection to Tolkien, where might we find other links between Tolkien and the Anglo-Saxon worlds? One promising strand is Anglo-Saxon history: Alban Gautier has convincingly shown that Aragorn has much in common with the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred the Great (d. 899). Other Anglo-Saxon royals, such as Oswald of Northumbria (d. 642) and Edward the Confessor (d. 1066), may also have influenced the portrayal of Aragorn: the former was a king who returned from exile, whereas the latter was the first king of whom it was claimed he had 'the royal touch': the hands of this Anglo-Saxon king, like Aragorn's, were the hands of a healer (see Porck, 2016). Another potentially viable Anglo-Saxon source is Old English prose. It is telling, perhaps, that Solopova & Lee only include two Old English prose texts in their book on medieval sources of Tolkien: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* narrative of Cyneheard and Cynewulf and the description

of elephants in a homily by Ælfric. Since the number of surviving prose texts greatly outnumber the canonical Old English poems, there remains much to be studied in relation to Tolkien's fiction. A third angle is Anglo-Saxon archaeology: Deborah Sabo has shown that there are many archaeological places in Middle-earth, such as the Barrow-Downs and the remains of Weathertop. Tolkien was a subscriber to the archaeological journal *Antiquity* and, thus, must have been interested in the material remains of the past. We may well wonder whether specific Anglo-Saxon archaeological finds sparked his imagination as well.

How to root out these other Anglo-Saxon sources? Often, matters come down to serendipity: during research into the period, one might stumble on some parallel between early medieval England and Tolkien's fictional world. However, there may be a more practical approach: taking Tolkien's references in his academic work as a point of departure. In what follows, I will demonstrate that three sources referred to in Tolkien's commentary to his *Beowulf* translation also found their way into his fiction. To my knowledge, the parallels below have not been noted elsewhere.

### 2.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NAMED: *THE DURHAM LIBER VITAE* AND *THE HOMECOMING OF BEORHTNOTH*

'Et qui non est inventus in libro vitae scriptus missus est in stagnum ignis' [And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the pool of fire.] (Rev. 20:15). This description of the fate of unrecorded souls during Judgement Day inspired the medieval term for a confraternity book: a *liber vitae*. These books recorded the names of benefactors of a certain church or monastery in order for them to be remembered. *The Durham Liber Vitae* (London, British Library, Cotton Domitian A.vii) is the oldest known exemplar from Anglo-Saxon England and was begun in the ninth century. It records hundreds of names of Anglo-Saxon monks, abbots and priests. Among these, Tolkien had found a priest named 'Biuulf' and commented that this was the only occurrence of the name Beowulf outside the Old English poem (Tolkien 2014, 145).<sup>4</sup>

It is in *The Durham Liber Vitae* that Tolkien would also have found the names of the two main characters of his *Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, a fictitious continuation of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*.<sup>5</sup> Whereas most of the

4) Interestingly, *The Durham Liber Vitae* also features names of other characters from *Beowulf*, such as Wiglaf, Offa, Hrothulf and Hygelac. See Neidorf.

personal names that appear in *Homecoming* were drawn from the Old English poem itself, the names of the two main protagonists, Tidwald and Torhthelm, appear only in *The Durham Liber Vitae*. They were listed side-by-side on folio 27r as 'Tiduæld' and 'Torcthelm'. While the question remains why these two names appealed to Tolkien more than other pairs (such as 'Aldmon' and 'Egilmund' on the same folio), we can at least establish that Tolkien did not coin these names himself. With hundreds of other names in *The Durham Liber Vitae*, it is possible that Tolkien drew on it for the many Anglo-Saxon names that appear in his *Legendarium* as well.

The identification of *The Durham Liber Vitae* as one of Tolkien's sources may do little to improve our appreciation or understanding of *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*, but if it has made the readers of this article interested in this Anglo-Saxon manuscript, at least one of the goals of source criticism (as outlined above) has been achieved.

## 2.2. NOT LIKE A THIEF: THE LAW CODE OF INE OF WESSEX AND THE HORN OF GONDOR

When Beowulf and his companions first enter the hall of Hrothgar, they are asked to lay down their weapons. In his commentary to this scene in *Beowulf*, Tolkien points out that such prohibitions to wear or draw weapons in a king's hall also feature in Anglo-Saxon laws. As an illustration, he cites an article from the law code of Ine, king of the West-Saxons (d. 726):

Gif hwá gefeohte on cyninges hūse, sīe hē scyldig ealles his ierfes ond sīe on cyninges dome hwæðer hē lif áge þe náge

[If any man fight in the king's house, he shall forfeit all his estate, and it shall be for the king to judge whether he be put to death or not]

(cited in Tolkien 2014, 222)

Naturally, the scene where Gandalf and his companions are asked to lay down their arms before entering Théoden's Golden Hall was inspired by the similar event in *Beowulf* (see, e.g., Tolley) as well as these Anglo-Saxon legal analogues.

5) First published in 1953, see also contributions by Honegger and Neubauer in this volume.

An echo from another article from Ine's law code makes an earlier appearance in *The Lord of the Rings*. It can be found in Boromir's explanation as to why he always sounds his horn before setting out, following a warning by Elrond:

'Slow should you be to wind that horn again, Boromir,' said Elrond, 'until you stand once more on the borders of your land, and dire need is on you.'

'Maybe,' said Boromir. 'But always I have let my horn cry at setting forth, and though thereafter we may walk in the shadows, I will not go forth as a thief in the night.'

(*LotR* 296)

In Boromir's refusal to go forth as a thief in the night, we hear an echo of Ine's law that a man should blow his horn, lest he be treated as a thief:

Gif feorcund mon oððe fremde butan wege geond wudu gonge 7 ne hrieme ne horn blawe, for ðeof he bið to profianne: oððe to sleanne oððe to aliesanne.

[If a far-coming man, or a stranger, journey through a wood out of the high-way, and neither shout nor blow his horn, he is to be held for a thief, either to be slain or redeemed.]

(Thorpe, 1840, 50)

Boromir, it seems, is abiding by Anglo-Saxon rules! A survey of other early medieval English law codes may reveal that more of the unwritten rules of Middle-earth were in fact once put to parchment by the Anglo-Saxons.

## 2.3. SUTTON HOO AND MIDDLE-EARTH: BURIAL MOUNDS AND DRAGON HELMETS

Perhaps the most important archaeological discovery dating to the Anglo-Saxon period took place when Tolkien was writing *The Lord of the Rings*: the excavation at Sutton Hoo in 1939. Archaeologists surveyed eighteen burial mounds dating from the sixth and seventh centuries and found several high-status graves, including the ship-burial that may have belonged to King Raedwald of the East-Angles (d. c. 624). The items found at Sutton Hoo, such as the gold-adorned



belt buckle and the famous Sutton Hoo helmet, are regarded as some of the most stunning pieces of early medieval craftsmanship. The find was greeted with much enthusiasm by those who studied the early Middle Ages and Tolkien was no exception. Deborah Higgins, on the basis of a telephone interview with Tolkien's daughter Priscilla, reports that the latter remembered 'the excitement with which her father received the news of the famous Sutton Hoo find and how 'thrilled' he was to read about it in the *Antiquity* journal he received quarterly when they dedicated an entire issue to Sutton Hoo and its elaborate treasure hoard' (59-60).<sup>6</sup>

While Higgins does not pursue the connection between Sutton Hoo and Tolkien's fiction any further, the mounds at Sutton Hoo are clearly the inspiration for the barrows of the Kings of Rohan. For one, the mounds in both places are each covered in grass and hold the bodies of high-status noblemen; in addition, there turn out to be an equal number of them. Initially, there are only sixteen burial mounds in Rohan – Aragorn notes: 'Seven mounds upon the left, and nine upon the right' (*LotR* 529) – to Sutton Hoo's eighteen. By the end of *The Return of the King*, however, the number of Rohirric burial mounds matches that of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery. The seventeenth mound is particularly interesting: it is the memorial for Snowmane, the horse of King Théoden, erected following the Battle of the Pelennor Fields. The second element of the grave's name, 'Snowmane's Howe', reflects the element Hoo in Sutton Hoo.<sup>7</sup> A further and more intriguing parallel is the fact that Mound 17 of Sutton Hoo also contained the skeleton of a horse, though buried alongside its rider. The similarity certainly appears too close to be coincidental. Tolkien's eighteenth barrow is that of King Théoden himself, buried in a burial chamber, filled with 'his arms and many other fair things that he had possessed' (*LotR* 1012). The grave arrangement does not sound unlike the king buried in the ship burial at Sutton Hoo (apart from the lack of a ship).

Given the similitude of the mounds of the Kings of Rohan and the Anglo-Saxon mounds at Sutton Hoo, some of the material artefacts that were found may also have made their way into Middle-earth. In this respect, it is worth noting that Tolkien's references to the hobbits' fondness for *mathoms* (from the Old English word *maðm* 'treasure') were added only at a very late stage of writ-

6) This would be issue 14 of *Antiquity*, published in 1940.

7) Both may derive from an Old Norse word *haugr* meaning 'mound'.



Image 1: 1947 reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo helmet. From: Maryon, pls. 1 and 3

ing (see *HoMe* 12, p. 8). The same goes for the inclusion of Bilbo's gift of silver spoons to Lobelia. This gift is not found in any of the early versions of *The Fellowship of the Ring* in *HoMe* and was probably added by Tolkien after he had read about the find of two silver baptismal spoons found at Sutton Hoo in the special issue of *Antiquity* in 1940.

Another issue of *Antiquity*, seven years later, reported on another Sutton Hoo find that triggered Tolkien's imagination: the reconstruction of the Sutton Hoo helmet, found in the royal ship burial. This helmet shows some similarities to sixth-century Vendel type helmets found in Sweden, such as a dragon crest running over the top of the helmet, terminating in a dragon's head at the front. What makes the Sutton Hoo helmet unique, as the archaeologist Maryon pointed out, is its visor that resembles a face, complete with eyebrows, a moustache and a mouth (see image 1).

This dragon-crested helmet would have reminded Tolkien of his own Dragon-



helm of Dor-lómin, an heirloom that plays a significant role in the story of Túrin Turambar. Tolkien's Dragon-helm also has a dragon for its crest and makes its first appearance in the alliterative versions of *The Lay of the Children of Húrin*:

a helm of Húrin once hewn in wars

...

Grey-gleaming steel, with gold adorned  
wright had wrought it, with runes graven  
of might and victory, that a magic sat there  
and its wearer warded from wound or death,  
whoso bore to battle brightly shining  
dire dragon-headed its dreadful crest.

(*HoMe* 3, 114, ll. 637-645)

Since the alliterative versions of *The Lay* were composed in the 1920s, Tolkien's conceit of a helmet with a dragon crest predates the Sutton Hoo helmet. Tolkien would mention the helmet again in two further versions of the Túrin story, in *The Quenta* (dated around 1930) and the *Quenta Silmarillion* (dated 1937-1938), noting that dragon-crest was, in fact, a gilded image of the dragon Glómund (later: Glaurung).<sup>8</sup>

Tolkien returned to the story of Túrin with increased interest for the Dragon-helm in the 1950s, some years after the publication about the Sutton Hoo helmet. In the *Grey Annals*, Tolkien added several references to the Dragon-Helm in pencil and noted, for instance, how 'while he [Túrin] wore the Dragon-helm of Galion he was proof against the glance of Glaurung' (*HoMe* 11, 'The Grey Annals', §280). In his commentary to his father's annotations, Christopher Tolkien suggests that they are related to an expanded description of the Dragon-Helm, published in *Unfinished Tales*. In this enhanced description, also published in *The Children of Húrin*, the Dragon-helm suddenly has a visor:

The Helm of Hador was given into Thingol's hands. That helm was made of grey steel adorned with gold, and on it were graven runes of victory. A power was in it that guarded any who wore it from wound or death, for

8) See *HoMe* 4, 182, and *HoMe* 5, 352-353, respectively.

the sword that hewed it was broken, and the dart that smote it sprang aside. It was wrought by Telchar, the smith of Nogrod, whose works were renowned. ***It had a visor (after the manner of those that the Dwarves used in their forges for the shielding of their eyes), and the face of one that wore it struck fear into the hearts of all beholders, but was itself guarded from dart and fire.*** Upon its crest was set in defiance a gilded image of Glaurung the dragon; for it had been made soon after he first issued from the gates of Morgoth. Often Hador, and Galdor after him, had borne it in war; and the hearts of the host of Hithlum were uplifted when they saw it towering high amid the battle, and they cried: 'Of more worth is the Dragon of Dorlómin than the gold-worm of Angband! ... ***But Hurin did not wear the Dragon-helm with ease, and in any case he would not use it, for he said: 'I would rather look on my foes with my true face.'*** Nonetheless he accounted the helm among the greatest heirlooms of his house.

(Tolkien 2007, 75 – emphasis mine)

I would not deem it unlikely that Tolkien's addition of the visor to Húrin's Dragon-helm stemmed from his reading of the 1947 Antiquity article about the Sutton Hoo helmet. The article, specifically, called attention to the visor as a unique feature: 'The most striking feature in the whole helmet is the visor... Its visor, embellished with gilded nose and mouth, is unique' (Maryon 144). To my knowledge, only one other helmet of this type with a visor has been found since the excavation at Sutton Hoo: Tolkien's Dragon-helm of Dorlómin.<sup>9</sup>

In the commentary to his *Beowulf* translation, Tolkien noted how the description of Beowulf's burial mound at the end of the poem was a 'very rare thing', in that it represents 'an actual poetic expression of feeling and imagination about "archaeological" material from an archaeological or sub-archaeological period' (Tolkien 2014, 352). Similarly, the description of the mounds of the Rohirric kings and the revision of the dragon-helm of Dorlómin demonstrate his own response to archeological material. It was not just poetry and language

9) In his commentary to *Beowulf*, Tolkien proposes an emendation that suggests a helmet with a visor is described by the *Beowulf* poet (though Tolkien does not mention the Sutton Hoo helmet). In a future publication, I plan to provide a more thorough analysis of the Dragon-helm of Dorlómin, the Sutton Hoo helmet and Tolkien's interpretation of the helmet in *Beowulf*.

that triggered Tolkien: the material world of the medieval past also found its way to Middle-earth.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Tolkien himself once wrote, with some regret, that the hunt for his sources would occupy 'a generation or two' of scholars (*Letters* 418). If Tom Shippey, who is still active today, represents the first generation of Tolkien scholars, there must still be potential sources for a second generation to explore and find. Whereas Old English language and Anglo-Saxon poetry seem sufficiently mined by Tolkien's source-hunters, other potential sources are 'just around the corner': Anglo-Saxon history, prose and archaeology. In other words, the end of the road has not yet been reached and the following words from a famous hobbit walking song should not be forgotten: 'Still round the corner there may wait / A new road or a secret gate'. Sometimes, we do not need to stray too far from the well-trodden path to find something new.

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## God's Chosen Warrior and the Ring-bearer

### Old English *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* as Sources of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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Threatening hills, a dying lord and a tempted hero are well-known elements from Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, yet few know that these same elements can also be found in two far older texts: the Old English *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*. As a scholar of Old English, J.R.R. Tolkien was certainly familiar with the Christian heroic poems *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*. In 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics' he lauds their poets for their 'command of dignified verse' (Tolkien 2006, 14). In those poems, he continues, 'there is well-wrought language, weighty words, [and] lofty sentiment' (14). As a consequence, the *Guthlac* poems can be defined, in Fisher's terms, as 'probable sources' for Tolkien's work: sources that 'Tolkien is known to have read, owned, enjoyed, or commented on' (Fisher 36). Despite Tolkien's apparent admiration for the *Guthlac* poems, their status as probable sources of Tolkien's fiction appears to have gone unnoticed in Tolkien scholarship. Sarah Downey is one of the few scholars who have connected the Old English poems to Tolkien's fiction. She argues that the *Guthlac* poems belong to the corpus of medieval texts that shaped Tolkien's Middle-earth (Downey 2006a, 262). To illustrate her claim, Downey remarks the likeness of *Guthlac*'s hill to the tombs of Tolkien's Barrow-wights in *The Lord of the Rings* and the shared motif of a lord's death in battle and his grieving retainer (262). However, these remarks are only found in an encyclopaedia entry and lack elaboration. My essay will attempt to fill this gap in Tolkien source criticism by analysing Downey's statements and examining further similarities between the *Guthlac* poems and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.